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## **CANADIAN OPERA COMPANY ANNOUNCES CONTRACT EXTENSION OF GENERAL DIRECTOR ALEXANDER NEEF AT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### **COC Posts Modest Surplus and Record-Breaking Fundraising High for 2016/2017 Season**

Toronto – Canadian Opera Company General Director Alexander Neef has signed a new contract with the COC that extends his tenure as General Director through the **2025/2026 season**. The extension of Neef’s contract was announced today at the COC’s Annual General Meeting by **COC Board Chair Colleen Sexsmith** as was the official financial report for the company’s last fiscal year. The COC, for the third consecutive year, posted a **modest surplus of \$11,000** for its 2016/2017 season with a **record-breaking achievement of \$13.9 million in total fundraising revenue**.

“I am very pleased to announce the extension of Alexander Neef’s tenure as the COC’s general director,” said **COC Board Chair Colleen Sexsmith**. “Alexander’s visionary artistic leadership has significantly advanced our company’s international profile and reputation, attracting the world’s best artists for significant role debuts and performances as well as creating new productions of critically important works and collaborating with industry-leading organizations. This must all be achieved, of course, while ensuring that the COC remains locally rooted and engaged with the communities that we serve.”

“The commitment of Alexander’s leadership of the COC for the next nine years ensures vital organizational continuity and sets the stage for the next phase of the company’s evolution,” added **Sexsmith**.

Alexander Neef’s new contract extends his tenure with the Canadian Opera Company through to the end of **September 2026**. The COC’s current 2017/2018 season marks Neef’s 10th as General Director.

“The last decade at the Canadian Opera Company has been the most important, challenging, and rewarding of my career. Through the productions that we’ve created, the artists we’ve been able to attract and the partnerships that we’ve built, the COC has emerged on the international stage as a truly significant producer of opera,” said **COC General Director Alexander Neef**. “What is imperative in the years to come is that we not only maintain, but exceed that level of excellence, in order to fulfill the unique purpose of the COC as a Canadian opera producer—a company that is responsive to contemporary realities in a global context, and in touch with the voices and perspectives that are essential to exploring what our art form can mean in the 21st century. That we are embarking on this next chapter from a position of strength gives me all the confidence in our success.”

The COC’s operating expenses for the 16/17 season were **\$43,335,000** with revenues of **\$43,346,000**, allowing the company to report a **modest surplus of \$11,000**. These expenses and revenues are a consolidated presentation of the financial results of the COC and its controlled affiliate, the Canadian Opera House Corporation, a charitable organization that owns and operates the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts.

In reflecting on the company’s total operations and financial position for the 16/17 season, **Sexsmith** emphasized how the COC’s commitment to artistic excellence must work hand-in-hand with financial rigour:

“At the heart of this company’s mission and vision for its future is an unequivocal belief in artistic excellence. Prudent management is essential to the realization of that ambition. Eradicating financial barriers to the art form, most immediately with regard to ticket price, remains a key priority.

**Sexsmith** added, “In that context, contributed revenue is becoming more important than ever with fundraising now making up 30% of the revenue for the COC alone, excluding the operations of the opera house. Our fundraising efforts this year were spectacular with a record \$13.9 million raised for operating and endowment needs combined. We are truly grateful to our supporters.”

The COC recorded a **total attendance and reach of 142,572** through the combined efforts of its mainstage programming (**99,296 patrons**), education and outreach events (**31,807 adults, youth and families**) and the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre at the Four Seasons Centre (**11,469 audience base of all ages**). Over the 16/17 season, **598** performances, community concerts and events were held showcasing the transformative power of operatic theatre with the COC welcoming visitors from all **13** provinces and territories in Canada, **36** American states and territories, and **36** countries representing six continents.

Beyond its company-specific programming, the COC was a key facilitator for Toronto’s cultural and civic life. The COC’s Four Seasons Centre and Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre hosted diverse activities featuring performing arts companies and non-profit organizations, including:

- Against the Grain Theatre
- Atelier Lyrique de l’Opéra de Montréal
- Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity
- Calgary Opera
- Canadian Sports Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony
- Edmonton Opera
- George Brown College
- Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyrique
- Luminato Festival
- The National Ballet of Canada
- Opera on the Avalon
- Pacific Opera Victoria
- Shen Yun Performing Arts
- Show One Productions
- Singing with Parkinson’s
- Stratford Festival
- Tapestry Opera
- Teatro Proscenium
- University of Guelph
- Vancouver Opera
- Volcano Theatre

The 16/17 mainstage season was comprised entirely of COC productions and presented a diverse repertoire that spanned 232 years of human creativity, from Handel’s *Ariodante* to Somers’ *Louis Riel*, with the *New York Times* proclaiming, “**The Canadian Opera Company has been doing attention-grabbing work.**”

A total of **99,296 patrons**, out of a capacity of 109,710, attended the **53 performances** of the company’s six mainstage productions presented last season at the Four Seasons Centre: Bellini’s *Norma*, Handel’s *Ariodante*, Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung*, Somers’ *Louis Riel*, and Puccini’s *Tosca*. Ticket-related revenue remained stable with the COC recording a total of **57,301 subscription tickets** and **38,097 single tickets** sold, **8,881 of which were sold to people under the age of 30**. Box office did see a minimal decline year-over-year, in part due to two fewer performances offered in 16/17 than in 15/16, but the season’s average attendance remained strong at 90% with total box office revenue of **\$9.5 million**.

The COC won **four Dora Mavor Moore Awards** for its artists and productions in the 16/17 season. *Norma* came away with three awards: outstanding performance for Sondra Radvanovsky, in the title role, as well as outstanding scenic design for David Korins and outstanding costume design for Jessica Jahn. The COC’s music director Johannes Debus was recognized with an award for outstanding musical direction for conducting *Götterdämmerung*.

Total fundraising revenue for the 16/17 season continues to reflect a passionate and involved base of supporters resulting in **\$13.9 million (operating and endowment)**. Approximately **82% of those funds came from individuals**. Of the remainder, **7% was raised through the COC’s major special events: Centre Stage**

Gala, Fine Wine Auction and Operanation; and **11% was raised through from the corporate sector and foundations**. The combined operating and endowment fundraising total grew by \$2.2 million over the 15/16 season due to an increase in support from major donors, corporate sponsorship and events, and the receipt of significant bequests.

The value of the Canadian Opera Foundation's endowment remains strong at **\$37.5 million** as of December 31, 2016. This is the result, in part, of the COC's continued efforts to maximize the Endowment Incentives component of the Canada Cultural Investment Fund combined with overall investment growth. Of the **\$1 million raised by the COC** for its endowment, 89.7% or \$897,704 was matched by the Department of Canadian Heritage. The COC drew a **net of \$1.7 million** from the Canadian Opera Foundation for the 16/17 season. This is the net of \$2.57 million from the Foundation to the COC, and a grant of \$820,000 from the COC to the Foundation, consisting of bequests and other monies received by the COC.

The COC received an additional **\$149,000** in government support for the 16/17 season to record **\$6.17 million**. All three levels of government have each recognized the important role of arts and culture in promoting social cohesion and economic vitality. This has resulted in commitments from each level for additional support for the arts sector as a whole. The COC's modest increase in government grants for 16/17 was primarily from the City of Toronto.

Bar, event, parking and third-party rentals at the Four Seasons Centre saw an increase in activity year-over-year, continuing to provide a strong and stable revenue stream for the COC. These activities posted a **combined increase of \$802,000** to contribute **\$8.79 million** in revenue towards the 16/17 season. Other income from such sources as production rentals, interest and rebates, as well as space rentals associated with the Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Opera Centre totalled **\$1.4 million, an increase of \$136,000** from last year.

Off the mainstage, the COC continued its efforts to bring the transformative impact of opera to various communities. In total, **31,807 adults, youths and families** engaged with opera in the 16/17 season through the COC's **438** education and outreach events. The annual attendance for the Free Concert Series in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre last year is estimated at **11,469** for **75 concerts**. The Free Concert Series' programming spans classical, jazz, world music, vocal, piano and dance. In 16/17, the series hosted **two world premieres** and **two Canadian premieres**, as well as showcased **467 artists**, of whom **over 96% were Canadian**.

The COC has continued to pursue initiatives to welcome new communities to its organization and the operatic art form over the course of the 16/17 season. Since its inception in 2016, the **Opera Access for New Canadians** program—delivered in partnership with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship—has welcomed **more than 400 refugees and newcomers to the Four Seasons Centre**. Partnering with **more than 40 community organizations** in the Greater Toronto Area, the COC's **Sun Life Financial Share the Opera** program provided **access to opera to nearly 1,000 youth and family members** who may not have had the opportunity to experience live performance due to economic or health reasons.

The COC's 2017/2018 season began on October 5, 2017, with the company premiere of Strauss' *Arabella* and a new production of Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*. The season continues in the winter with a new production of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and the return of the COC's staging of Verdi's *Rigoletto*. The season concludes in the spring with the highly anticipated revival of Robert Lepage's visionary production of Stravinsky's *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables*, paired with a new production of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*. This is the fourth consecutive year that the company has been able to present an all-COC line-up of productions.

#### **About the Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio**

The COC Ensemble Studio, underwritten in part by Peter M. Deeb, Marjorie and Roy Linden, Sheila K. Piercey, RBC Foundation and The Slight Family Foundation, is Canada's premier training program for young opera professionals and provides advanced instruction, hands-on experience, and career development opportunities. The Ensemble Studio is also supported by the Government of Canada, the Hal Jackman Foundation and other generous donors.

**About the Canadian Opera Company**

Based in Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company is the largest producer of opera in Canada and one of the largest in North America. The COC enjoys a loyal audience support-base and one of the highest attendance and subscription rates in North America. Under its leadership team of General Director Alexander Neef and Music Director Johannes Debus, the COC is increasingly capturing the opera world's attention. The COC maintains its international reputation for artistic excellence and creative innovation by creating new productions within its diverse repertoire, collaborating with leading opera companies and festivals, and attracting the world's foremost Canadian and international artists. The COC performs in its own opera house, the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, hailed internationally as one of the finest in the world. Designed by Diamond Schmitt Architects, the Four Seasons Centre opened in 2006. For more information on the COC, visit [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).

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